

Washington State Department  
of Social and Health Services

# Customer Service Handbook

Community Services Division

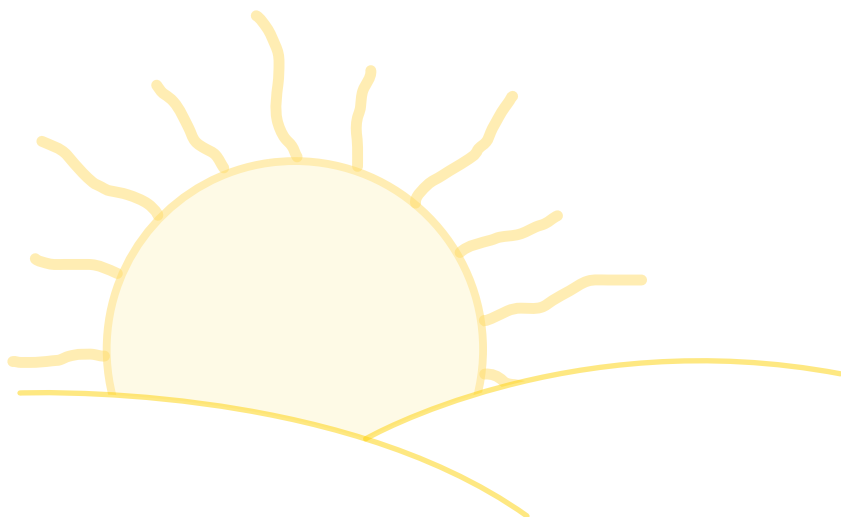
REGION 6



Creating an  
atmosphere of  
respect and  
excellent  
service

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# Letter From the Regional Administrator

## *To all Region 6 Employees*

Our mission is to provide the resources and support that help people build better lives. How we do this identifies how well we provide this vital service to the citizens of the State of Washington.

### **Good Customer Service – What is it?**

It is service that each of us delivers in a way that:

- Makes customers feel important.
- Makes customers feel heard.
- Makes customers feel respected.
- Responds to the need to the greatest degree possible.
- Empowers customers through honest and trustworthy interactions.

The main idea is that each customer should leave with a feeling of being well taken care of.

### **Good Customer Service applies to all of us!**

Good customer service needs to come from all of us at all levels – internal and external. In each act of service, we need to apply the measures I listed above.

### **Good Customer Service even when we are saying no!**

This is the time when listening, acknowledging and responding in a caring way are the most important. We can't always deliver what people ask for or need, but we can choose to work with them in a way that says we care and are doing everything we can to respond.

### **Excellent Customer Service requires courage and innovation!**

- We not only need to properly greet people, interact and be courteous, but we also need to be problem solvers.
- We need to listen, gather more information and listen some more.
- We need to be experts in resources to solve problems – who to call to get what our customers need.
- We need to be masters of “follow through” and do what we say we will do.
- We need to care for ourselves – to help ensure we are at our best.

Thank you for everything you do to ensure excellent customer service in Region 6!

Cindy Mund

*Regional Administrator, Community Services Division Region 6*

# Introduction

Many people have a misconception that customer service is less important in public sector organizations than it is in private organizations. However, as stated, this is a misconception. Customer service is expected as much from public sector organizations as it is from private organizations.

**Every day you provide a valuable public service that:**

- Benefits adults and children.
- Demonstrates high standards of personal integrity and professionalism.
- Gains the trust and respect of our customers and co-workers.

You're in a noble profession; be proud of what you do and where you work.

In Region 6, we work to create a culture centered on customer service that includes employees as well as external customers.

This handbook contains our customer service standards, supporting policies, customer service principles, and staff resources. This information, along with our customer service workshops, provides valuable customer service tools.

## On a typical day in Region 6...

More than 81,000 people are able to afford nutritious food.

More than 41,000 adults and children are getting cash assistance to help them meet their basic needs.

More than 1,400 parents learn how to find a job and get help paying for the clothes, child care and transportation they will need to become a full-time worker.

Nearly 1,600 parents are working to resolve serious family issues such as domestic violence, homelessness and substance abuse.

More than 7,200 families get help to pay for the child care they need to go to work.

**YOU make a difference!**

# Customer Service Standards

**We respect individuals** – We always use good people skills such as smiles and a pleasant voice. Make customers feel important and use the “golden rule” of treating others as you would want to be treated. Make the customer feel heard.

**We are responsive** – Don’t make excuses, instead adopt the motto: “It’s my job.” Exceed expectations.

**We empower customers** – Be honest. Focus on what people are eligible for and avoid focusing on what they can’t have.

Use constructive words that are solution-based rather than blame-based. Here are some value-added words and phrases you can use.

## Value Added Vocabulary

INSTEAD OF SAYING...	HOW ABOUT...
I need (want) you to...	Will you?
You have to...	Are you willing?
I’ll try.	I’ll personally look into your situation
We don’t do that here.	Let me give you a number...
Sorry.	I apologize for... (be specific)
I can’t do that.	I’m unable to because... (reasons plus options)
You are required to...	What would it mean to you if
You need to...	You could... (get transportation)
You must...	Get child care, get an education
Don’t you want to be a better parent?	You and your family deserve an opportunity to build a better life.

“Biggest question: Isn’t it really ‘customer helping’ rather than customer service? And wouldn’t you deliver better service if you thought of it that way?”

– Jeffrey Gitomer  
*Author and sales trainer*

# Customer Service Principles

Service is the primary mission of state government. The way we provide service to the citizens of this State determines whether we have satisfied customers or dissatisfied customers. In all our interactions, adhere to professional standards even when a more assertive approach is needed to manage an issue effectively.

"All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence."

– Martin Luther King, Jr.  
*American Leader, 1929-1968*

## 1. Treat Customers with Respect

Every customer who interacts with us is entitled to fair and courteous treatment. Respect, concern, courtesy and responsiveness in meeting the needs of our customers are the key to all interactions.<sup>1</sup>

### Points to remember:

- Welcome your customers.
- Use their name.
- Acknowledge their emotions & empathize.
- Reassure customers you can help.
- Take care of their needs.
- Thank customers and leave them with a positive comment. For example:
  - "Thank you for bringing in all this information; it helps us process your benefits faster."
  - "Thank you for having such well behaved children."
  - "Thank you for being on time."

"Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being."

– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe  
*18th Century German author and philosopher*

## 2. Maintain a positive attitude at all times.

Choose your attitude. How you think about customers is how you will treat them.

- The number one thing that really matters to customers is how they are treated.
- Keep your focus on what you can do to solve a customer's problem.
- Exhibit a "glad I could help" attitude when dealing with customers.
- Smile.

<sup>1</sup> DSHS Administrative Policy No. 6.04

### 3. Respect the Customer's Viewpoint

Always remember that most of our customers are in crisis when they come into our office or call us on the phone. In order to be effective, we need to respect their assessment of the crisis.

Take the time to listen carefully and understand their viewpoint. Even if you have listened to the same type of crisis or complaint time and time again, nevertheless each customer deserves to be heard.

Remember to use “L.A.S.T.”

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Listen</b>    | Listening is one of the most important – and underrated – skills we possess. It’s one thing to hear what someone is saying. It’s another to truly listen. Don’t interrupt!                  |
| <b>Apologize</b> | It’s hard to apologize – especially if something isn’t your fault! But, it goes with the territory.   |
| <b>Solve</b>     | Solve their problem together – the important thing to demonstrate is that you, personally, are going to take responsibility to work with your customer to try and resolve whatever you can. |
| <b>Thank</b>     | Leave your customer with the feeling that their problem (and your shared experience of solving it) has been worth it.   |

### 4. Recognize Excellent Customer Service Skills

Everyone needs to know when their work is appreciated and effective.

Take the time to:

- Watch for opportunities to recognize people doing well.
- Watch for opportunities to model excellent skills.
- Share your compliments.

“People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed, and redeemed; never throw out anyone.”

– Audrey Hepburn  
*Actress and UNICEF Ambassador*

# Complaint Process

An effective customer complaint process is an integral part of every agency's quality system. To that end, we have a specific complaint process to follow. The complaint process goes through your chain of command in your CSO. Be sure to check with your supervisor to determine who you go through.

## 1. Try to resolve the complaint yourself.

First, always try to solve a customer's complaint yourself. Ninety percent of the time, complaints are resolved using this (informal) process.

"Mistakes are the portal to discovery."

– James Joyce  
*Irish Author, 1882-1941*

## 2. Escalate to your supervisor

If your customer is not satisfied, your first point of contact is your supervisor. Customers have the right to speak to your supervisor or have a decision or action reviewed by your supervisor, whether or not a formal complaint has been filed.

# Compliments

While we do not want you to solicit compliments from your customers, we expect you to thank customers for their recognition of your efforts. When you get a compliment, be sure to send it up the chain of command. If a customer compliments a co-worker, take the time to tell your co-worker, their supervisor, and even post it to iESA (the Administration's website). If your office has a recognition program, use that process.

"Kind words do not cost much.  
Yet they accomplish much."

– Blaise Pascal  
*17th Century French  
Mathematician and  
Philosopher*



## Staff Resources

To help you learn and enhance your customer service skills and techniques, Region 6 provides:

### ■ Training Classes

There are many options available, ranging from 1 day sessions to 1 week sessions. Check the Department of Personnel website <http://www.dop.wa.gov/Employees/TrainingAndDevelopment/> or the DSHS Office of Organization & Employee Development (OOED) site <http://hrd.dshs.wa.gov/OOED/index.htm> for suggested classes.

It is always a good idea to sharpen your skills. Talk with your supervisor about what might be the best option for you.

### • Customer Service Workshops

Periodically the Region conducts 1-day workshops that focus on Customer Service issues. Check the region calendar on our website to find out when the next workshop will be held.

"Without great employees  
you can never have great  
customer service."

– Richard F. Gerson,  
*Author and Marketing  
Professional*

### • Web page

Refer to the "Customer Service" web page on our regional Training website for a list of related resources.

### • Value Added Vocabulary

This is a 3" x 5" reference card you can use to quickly find phrases that are solution-based. Get this card from your supervisor.

## Notes

[illegible]



